



Geoff Lee

Acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans
Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 28 May 2020

PACIFIC ADVOCATE AWARDED TOP HONOURS

A Pacific communities advocate who has dedicated her working life to raising the profile of marginalised descendants of Australia's indentured slave trade has been awarded top honours by the NSW Government.

The Settlement Services International Human Rights Medal was awarded to Waskam Emelda Davis as part of the 2020 Premier's Multicultural Community Medals.

Acting Minister for Multiculturalism Geoff Lee congratulated Ms Davis on her achievements, particularly in light of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

"Now more than ever, the tireless work of our community leaders promoting social cohesion and community harmony is vital," Mr Lee said.

"Even during COVID-19, incredible leaders like Emelda and organisations such as Australian South Sea Islanders – Port Jackson (ASSIPJ) continue to engage and connect with people in a time where physical distancing has challenged the way communities interact."

Ms Davis is the founding member and President of ASSIPJ and was instrumental in establishing the first national South Sea Islander constitution.

Pastor Ray Minniecon, whose ancestors were forcibly removed and brought to Australia during the Blackbirding era, said Ms Davis "worked passionately and tirelessly with the Australian South Sea Islander community in progressing initiatives for social justice for our people".

In particular, he noted Ms Davis' work in "raising awareness of our blackbirding history and highlighting his people as a distinct cultural group."

"Not only has she been an outstanding leader in representing our community to government, she has also been very compassionate and hands-on," Pastor Minniecon said.

"The organisation for which she has chaired for many years, ASSIPJ, has been a tower of strength to us, facilitating community development programs in both Sydney and throughout Australia."

Ms Davis said she was humbled to receive the Premier's NSW Human Rights medal.

"I humbly accept this award on behalf of all those who have fought for justice for Australian South Sea Islanders in Australia and the region.

"It is a fantastic recognition of Australian South Sea Islander 'Black-birding' history, our culture, and fight for self-determination and equal opportunity across all areas of government within Australia."

"On behalf of my community, we look forward to building on this acknowledgement to create a more inclusive and dynamic future for our collective generations to come."

The Premier's Multicultural Community Medals are traditionally awarded at the annual Premier's Harmony Dinner gala event. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Premier's Multicultural Community Medals were awarded virtually.

For more information about the Premier's Multicultural Community Medals and Multicultural Honour Roll see: <http://multicultural.nsw.gov.au>

MEDIA: Nomiky Panayiotakis 0418 680 775